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**LISTING OF THE CLAIMS:**

1. (Currently Amended) A slitting tool for use in severing a tubular body positioned around an implantable medical device (IMD), comprising:  
a body member having a top surface and a nose section coupled to the top surface and having a front surface and an underside surface;  
a gripping mechanism coupled to the body member to be pendent from the body member opposite the top surface;  
the top surface of the body member having an area adapted to receive a thumb when the tool is adapted to be gripped by a user, the top surface having a an open channel to accept align the an IMD, and whereby gripping action of the thumb of a user maintains the IMD within the channel; and  
a cutting member coupled to the underside surface of the nose section of the body member and positioned to sever the tubular body without severing the IMD.
2. (Currently Amended) The slitting tool of Claim 1, wherein the thumb receiving area surface has a recessed area to be gripped by the user.
3. The slitting tool of Claim 2, wherein the recessed area is textured.
4. The slitting tool of Claim 3, wherein the recessed area is surface treated to provide texturing.
5. The slitting tool of Claim 4, wherein the recessed area is surface treated using a process selected from the group consisting of plasma etching, chemical milling, and ion bombardment.

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6. The slitting tool of Claim 1, wherein the body member includes an overmold area formed adjacent a base portion, the overmold area forming at least a portion of the channel.
7. The slitting tool of Claim 6, wherein the overmold area is formed of a lower durometer polymer than the base portion of the body member.
8. The slitting tool of Claim 7, wherein the lower durometer polymer has a high tack.
9. (Cancelled)
10. (Cancelled)
11. (Currently Amended) The slitting tool of Claim 1, wherein the ~~body member~~ gripping mechanism includes a gripping member.
12. The slitting tool of Claim 11, wherein the gripping member is a ring to receive at least one finger of a user.
13. The slitting tool of Claim 11, wherein the body member includes a guard member to protect the user from the cutting member.
14. (Currently Amended) The slitting tool of Claim 1, wherein ~~the body includes a nose portion projecting from the body, and wherein~~ a portion of the channel extends adjacent the nose portion.
15. The slitting tool of Claim 14, wherein the nose portion is positioned to be placed between the IMD and the tubular body.

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16. The slitting tool of Claim 1, wherein the cutting member has an angle of less than sixty degrees.
17. The slitting tool of Claim 1, wherein the cutting member has a sawtooth edge.
18. The slitting tool of Claim 1, wherein the channel includes a textured surface.
19. The slitting tool of Claim 18, wherein the channel is surface treated to provide the textured surface.
20. The slitting tool of Claim 19, wherein the channel is surface treated using a process selected from the group consisting of plasma etching, chemical milling, and ion bombardment.
21. The slitting tool of Claim 1, wherein the channel is adapted to accommodate lead bodies having a diameter of between 2 and 8 French.
22. The slitting tool of Claim 1, wherein the channel includes at least one stepped portion to accommodate lead bodies of varying sizes.
23. The slitting tool of Claim 14, wherein the channel has a varying depth.
24. The slitting tool of Claim 23, wherein the channel is deepest along the portion of the channel extending adjacent the nose portion.
25. The slitting tool of Claim 16, wherein the cutting member has an angle of between 15 and 45 degrees.

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26. (Withdrawn)

27. (Withdrawn)

28. (Withdrawn)

29. (Withdrawn)

30. (Withdrawn)

31. (Withdrawn)

32. (Withdrawn)

33. (Cancelled)

34. (Cancelled)

35. (Cancelled)

36. (Cancelled)